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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KTIP](#) [KWMN](#) [KDRM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AL](#)
SUBJECT: GOA APPROVES BENEFITS FOR TIP VICTIMS; PLEDGES MORE
ASSISTANCE

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE TREAT ACCORDINGLY

11. (SBU) Summary: Over the past three months, the GOA has launched several new initiatives in anti-TIP to accelerate the momentum it lost in the latter half of 2009 during the electoral campaign. Foremost among these initiatives are the GOA's decision that victims of trafficking are now eligible for social services and that shelters will receive state assistance in 2010. The MFA will also host a regional TIP conference in April, and the Prosecutor General's Office endorsed stronger cooperation. The developments are significant and provide much needed assistance to the shelters and the victims. Adding to the progress was the MFA's effort last week to heighten the visibility of trafficking by naming TIP activist Vera Lesko as Albania's TIP Ambassador at Large. Lesko, in her acceptance remarks, praised the GOA for the reduction in trafficking. End summary.

12. (SBU) In the past few weeks, the GOA has announced two major initiatives aimed at assisting victims of trafficking. First, National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator and Deputy Minister of Interior Iva Zajmi announced that victims of trafficking will soon be eligible to receive state social services for, among other things, medical care. This is significant because in the past victims of trafficking have been unable to receive free medical care from the state after their experiences. In addition, Minister of Interior Lulzim Basha met with the leaders of the five shelters (one government run and four NGO run) two weeks ago, and pledged that the NGO shelters would receive GOA financial assistance in 2010. Harkening back to PM Sali Berisha's pledge to assist the shelters financially, Basha said that the shelters need only to present proposals to his Ministry for funding and then financing could be provided. In separate conversations with NGO representatives present at the meeting, they characterized the meeting with Basha as "positive" and seemed perplexed that he was actually "listening" to them and discussing how to move forward. NGO representatives added that they have funding proposals ready so the ball will quickly return to the GOA's court.

13. (SBU) In a separate meeting, Prosecutor General Ina Rama told the Deputy Chief of Mission she would review Post's suggestion that Rama appoint an advocate for victims in her office in order to protect victims' rights and assist them through the prosecution process. Recognizing that prosecutors view trafficking cases differently from social workers, Rama said that such an advocate could play a key role in improving cases and therefore convictions. Post also raised cases in which convicted traffickers had been freed by the Supreme Court on what some legal scholars say were dubious legal grounds. Rama said she is well aware of this phenomenon and has raised it personally with the Prime Minister.

14. (SBU) The MFA also wants to get in on the action and honored Vera Lesko, the founder of the Vatra shelter in Vlore and a 2009 TIP Hero, as a TIP Honorary Ambassador on February 4. FM Ilir Meta hailed Lesko's work at the well-attended event and announced that the GOA will host a regional conference on combating TIP in April. When Lesko spoke, she said that trafficking in persons has declined considerably over previous years and cited the government's role in combating trafficking, as a key factor. She also urged all parties to remain vigilant, saying that while the NGO community has come a long way in past years, the struggle is not over. Foreign Minister

Iilir Meta told poloff after the event that funding for the shelters is forthcoming.

15. (SBU) Comment: The announcements that TIP victims would receive free social services and that the GOA will provide financial assistance to the shelters are important measures and highly significant, once enacted. However, two local leaders of the NGO community have both said that they feel this time these pledges will be honored, a noteworthy sentiment given their usual pessimistic nature regarding the GOA. There is no question that the GOA is talking more about both of these issues and increasing its direct engagement, both of which are positive. As for the Supreme Court and prosecutions, PG Rama seemed quite open to moving forward but did acknowledge the difficulty not only in prosecuting TIP cases, but also the general corruption in the judicial system. In Post's view, the reversals of TIP convictions reflect widespread corruption in the judiciary rather than any ill intentions by the GOA, as many cases are overturned on numerous issues. The MFA's splash onto the scene is also welcome, although some feathers have already been ruffled by FM Meta's "intrusion" into anti-TIP activities. Regardless, it is heartening to hear GOA officials complain about other officials doing TIP work; these spats are more welcome than no one talking about TIP at all.

WITHERS